

The Amateur in You, Part 1

What have you been pondering?



Traffic

On many nets, you might hear Net Control say, *When you check in, please indicate whether you have any traffic for the net.* Or, even when Net Control doesn't ask for it, you might hear net participants say, *K17ABC, no traffic.* So, exactly what is traffic?

The word **traffic** means, essentially, a *message*. But there are typically three different kinds of messages that are passed or aired on ham radio: *formal traffic*, *emergency traffic*, and *informal traffic*.

Formal traffic

A national organization called NTS (National Traffic System) is a network of amateur radio stations and others who are organized for the purpose of relaying formal traffic messages. It was originally set up as a way to provide an amateur radio means of communication between government officials (such as the governors of two states caught in a hurricane) who are not licensed amateurs, while maintaining message integrity.

Besides the conveyed text, these messages include the name of the sender, the name of the recipient, the number of message words, and more, much like a paper telegram. They are passed between one ham operator and another in a very exact and procedural method. Again, the purpose of formal traffic is to pass precisely worded messages. Nets that are set up to handle formal traffic using the NTS standard can become quite complex.

Emergency traffic

(also known as *priority traffic*)

An incident in our context is a situation that poses a threat to health, life, or property. Any incident-related message that must be given to, or received by, an emergency official, such as an Incident Commander, your doctor,

the police, your religious leader, or others engaged in an incident, is considered *emergency traffic*. The message might or might not be very formal, but typically it's conveyed as a high-priority request or order.

Informal traffic

An informal traffic message is not technically *traffic* in the sense of the original definition, but is still referred to as traffic because it's a message delivered by a ham radio operator to listening participants. It can be an announcement, a reminder, instruction, or some other information intended for some or all of the listening audience. Unlike formal or emergency traffic, an informal message can simply be informational, personal, or even funny.

Be sure to understand what kind of traffic is expected on a particular net or activity, before offering a traffic message, since many emergency nets will not allow informal ones. Along the same lines, be sure to listen to your net's preamble, to know how to respond to a call from Net Control, whether any traffic announcement is *expected from* the participants. Then, you can check in with your call sign and say *no traffic* if you have none.

P.S.

Once in awhile you might encounter a net in which Net Control will say something like, *Before we call for check-ins, is there any priority or emergency traffic for the net?* and then pause for a response. These nets are set up by the net manager to receive and relay formal traffic messages, using the NTS standard. This typically means that Net Control has specifically been trained on NTS procedure, and can handle formal traffic messages at the start of the net, in case it was necessary, or somebody on the net had a formal message they needed to pass along.

